

# A Bilingual Rarity in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection of Lead Seals: A Greek/Armenian Bulla of the Later 10th/Early 11th Centuries

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In sixth-century Byzantium it was not uncommon for private citizens or public officials to issue seals inscribed in Latin or bilingual seals inscribed on one face in Latin and in Greek on the other. Numerous examples are to be found in the Zacos-Veglery catalogue of Byzantine lead seals, such as the sixth-century bulla of a certain Karellos stratelates; the obverse has the owner's name in Greek script and his title is on the reverse in Latin.<sup>1</sup> In the early decades of the seventh century, Latin ceased to be employed on Byzantine seals (with the exception of imperial seals) and Greek was routinely used on private and public seals until the later decades of the tenth century. From ca. 950 to ca. 1050 there also survives a relatively small group of lead seals bearing inscriptions in Arabic or Syriac script.<sup>2</sup> Often the obverse of these is decorated with a bust or full-length depiction of the Virgin

or a saint, accompanied by an identifying legend in Greek, while the field of the reverse is filled with an inscription indicating the owner's name. Thus Schlumberger has published a small bulla stamped with the effigy of St. George (obverse) and a three-line inscription in Arabic (reverse) which translates as the name Ibrahim.<sup>3</sup> Bonner et al. have published a seal decorated with a bust of the Virgin (obverse) and inscribed (reverse) in Arabic with an inscription which reads in translation: "Hasan and Salama, the sons of Sa'id."<sup>4</sup>

It is against this background of linguistic developments among Byzantine lead seals that we present the following bulla, a bilingual seal inscribed on one face in Greek and on the other face in Armenian.<sup>5</sup>

Fogg 2001. Diam.: 22 mm; field: 19mm.

*Obverse:* Inscription of five lines. Border of dots. Figs. 1a and 2a (enlarged).

<sup>1</sup>Karellos' seal is no. 769 in G. Zacos-A. Veglery, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, I (Basel, 1972). For examples of seals with Latin legends (non-imperial), see nos. 346–47, 354, 459, 488 A, 527, 532, 534, 767–68, 773 A, 786, 806–7, 810–11, 851, 853, 880, 884, 886–87, 887 A, 929, 930, 959, 973, 982, 1018, 1020, 1050, 1068, 1072, and 1092; for instances of bilingual seals, see *ibid.*, nos. 286, 287, 290, 292, 305, 311–14, 321, 326–28, 331–33, 335, 339, 346, 348, 350–51, 372, 384, 391–92, 395, 516, 524, 526, 528, 533, 539, 544, 556, 571, 730 A, 732, 734, 740, 763, 765, 804–5, 813, 815, 841, 855, 892, 898, 981, 990–91, 1025, 1028, 1056, 1075–76, and 1088.

<sup>2</sup>Such seals are rare in print, but not so rare in collections. The Dumbarton Oaks Collection, for example, contains some eighty seals inscribed with Arabic or Syriac script. At present no systematic study exists of this special, and undoubtedly interesting, category of Byzantine seals; when the Dumbarton Oaks group is published, we will be in a much better position to understand the chronology of the phenomenon and to assess the significance of such seals for the study of Byzantium and its ethnic minorities. For brief discussion of seals with Syriac or Arabic script, see G. Schlumberger, *Sigillographie de l'empire byzantin* (Paris, 1884), 74–76. Cf. N. Oikonomides, *Byzantine Lead Seals* (Washington, D.C., 1985), 18.

<sup>3</sup>Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, 76.

<sup>4</sup>G. Bonner, G. M. Meredith-Owens, and J. Walker, "A Byzantino-Arabic Bulla," *The British Museum Quarterly* 25 (1962), 15 = Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, 75, no. 2.

<sup>5</sup>No Greek/Armenian bilingual seal has, so far as we know, yet been published. W. Seibt notes, however, in his "Ein Bleisiegel mit hebräischer Legende aus dem 12. Jh.," *JÖB* 26 (1977), 110 note 6, the existence of three such seals, one each in Vienna, Venice, and Basel. Armenian/Arabic coins, of course, are well known. We would like to thank Prof. J.-P. Mahé (Paris and Harvard) and Dr. P. Bedoukian for verifying our reading of the Armenian legend and the content of this paper.



+ΚΕ. | ΗΘΙΕΜ. | Τ. ΜΑΧΙΤ. | Ρ. ΣΤ. ΦΙ. | ΠΟΝ

Κ(ύρι)ε [β(ο)]ήθι ἐμ[ι] τ(ῷ) Μαχιτ[α]ρ(ιῷ) (καὶ)  
τ(ὸν) Φι[λ(ι)]πον.

*Reverse:* Inscription of five lines. Border of dots.  
Figs. 1b and 2b (enlarged).



†| δωριώ|. ουστ|. |. ωρωτ|. |. τλιψ| ουτ|.

Ծառա(յ)[ի]ս Մ[ս][իթ]արա(յ) Ե[ւ] Փ[ա]հլիպոսի.

"Of me, servant (of God), Mxit'ar, and of Philip."

#### COMMENTARY

*Date:* The epigraphic characteristics of the Greek show the seal to be of the later tenth or early eleventh century. This date is in line with the paleographic traits of the Armenian, of which a major feature is the mixing of minuscule with uncial forms. While it is true that manuscripts and epigraphy do not offer clear parallels, we observe among Armenian Cilician coins (a series com-

mencing in the late eleventh century<sup>6</sup>) a period of flux in which some issues were minted with their legends in minuscule and others inscribed in majuscule.

*Armenian text:* The introductory formula, "servant (of God)," is very common in Armenian. Drawn from biblical writings,<sup>7</sup> it is used on the earliest issues of Armenian coins of the late eleventh century, for example, two copper issues attributed to Roupen I (1080–95) or to his son, Constantine I (1095–99), of Cilician Armenia, and, later, a copper coin of Levon II (1187–98).<sup>8</sup> The first two coins are inscribed in minuscule, while the latter is inscribed in capitals. The Armenian formula is a translation of the Greek δοῦλος, very common on Greek seals, as in the expression Κύριε (or Θεοτόκε) βοήθει τῷ σῷ δούλῳ.

*Prosopography:* The Greek legend, reinforced by the Armenian inscription, implies that this seal was issued by two individuals. The name Mxit'ar (Մխիթար; Greek: Machetarios) is one of the most common of Armenian names.<sup>9</sup> Many Mxit'ars are known who were active in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Many were priests or scribes and lived in Armenia proper, and most of those referred to in Byzantine sources are listed in the works of A. Kazhdan and P. Charanis.<sup>10</sup> Mxit'ar is also the

<sup>6</sup>Concerning the early history of coinage in the Cilician period, see P. Z. Bedoukian, "Coins of the Baronial Period of Cilician Armenia (1080–1198)," *The American Numismatic Society Museum Notes* 12 (1966), 139–145; repr. in *Selected Numismatic Studies of P. Z. Bedoukian* (Los Angeles, 1981), 95–101. There is, however, a very rare issue of coins minted in Greater Armenia with Armenian script at the end of the 10th century by a border chieftain named Korike on whom the Byzantines had bestowed the title of europalates. On the two examples of this coinage which Bedoukian has published, with illustrations, two different letters, a "P" on one coin and a "T" on the other, can be considered as small letters, at least as Bedoukian has reproduced them in his "A Rare Armenian Coin," *The American Numismatic Society Museum Notes* 5 (1952), 183; repr. in his *Selected Numismatic Studies*, 3 (see, *ibid.*, 253–54 and 449–50); cf., for a complete bibliography of the coins, Y. T. Nercessian, *Armenian Numismatic Bibliography and Literature* (Los Angeles, 1984), 374–80. The earliest published examples of seals with Armenian script belong to the Cilician period (from 1080). Unlike coins, inscriptions on these seals were consistently rendered in majuscule.

<sup>7</sup>See, e.g., Ex. 32:13; 2 Paralip. 6:42; Ps. 128:49; 1 Esdras 5:41; Nehem. 7:67; and especially 2 Macch. 7:6 and Ps. 134:14: ի ծառայ իւր մխիթարի.

<sup>8</sup>Bedoukian, "Coins of the Baronial Period of Cilician Armenia (1080–1198)," 139–40 (coins 3 and 4) and 144; repr. in *Selected Numismatic Studies*, 95–96 and 100.

<sup>9</sup>H. Adjarian, *Dictionary of Armenian Personal Names* (in Armenian; repr. Beirut, 1972), III, 366–91.

<sup>10</sup>It is worthwhile to mention here two Mxit'ars related to Byzantine history who have gone unnoticed in the standard secondary literature. The first is the son of Spramik, to whom John Tzimiskes sent Basil and Constantine (the sons of Romanos) after the murder of Nikephoros Phokas. The other is the patriarch Mxit'ar, a Christian officer serving in the armies of Sultan

name of a well-known Armenian family.<sup>11</sup> The more prominent members of the family in the eleventh century include: a Basil Machetarios (before 1071), judge and katepan of Melitene and Lykandos; a Leo Machetarios, spatharokoubikouarios; a Michael Machetarios, vestarches, who served in the secreton of the Myrelaion (1087); and George Machetarios, protoanthypatos and imperial notarios (1082 or 1092).<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately our seal does not provide any clues regarding the specific identity of its owner; so it is impossible to relate the Machetarios recorded on this seal to any particular person. In any event, it is likely that our seal dates from the earliest period of the rise of the family within Byzantine administrative circles. The second individual mentioned on the seal is a certain Philip(p)os. In the Armenian, the sense of P'philip(p)os is ambiguous; it may be either a Christian or a family name, but on balance it is probably used here only as a Christian name. It occurs in Armenian sources under such different spellings as Φιλιψ[ψ]ου (P'philip[p]os), Φιλιψψ (P'philippē), Φιλιψ (P'lip). Many Philips are known from the Armenian sources of the tenth and eleventh centuries, all, with the exception of Philip, the son of Gregory Magistros, living in Greater Armenia or Cappadocia.<sup>13</sup> The phraseol-

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Ridvan of Aleppo. During the siege of Edessa in 1095–96, he delivered the chief citadel of Edessa into the hands of the curoplates T'oros. Armenian source: Matthew of Edessa, *Chronicle* (Jerusalem, 1869), 8 and 304; A. E. Dostourian, *The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa* (trans. from the original Armenian), diss. (Rutgers University, 1972), 8 and 291. Cf. Adjarian, *Dictionary*, III, 367 (no. 7) and 368 (no. 14). For the relevant works of A. Kazhdan and P. Charanis, see below, notes 11 and 15.

<sup>11</sup> The Machetarios family, attested by seals and mentioned in documents and historical texts, has been the subject of several prosopographical notices. See A. P. Kazhdan, *Armiiane v sostave gospodstvuiuscheho klassa vizantiiskoi imperii v XI–XII vv.* (Erevan, 1975), 100–103; cf. V. Laurent, “Légendes sigillographiques et familles byzantines,” *EO* 31 (1932), 347–50, and N. Adontz, “Notes Arméno-Byzantines,” *Byzantion* 9 (1934), 367–71.

<sup>12</sup> Basil Machetarios is known from a seal published by Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, 282–83, and also by V. Laurent, *Les sceaux byzantins du Médailleur Vatican* (Vatican City, 1962), no. 129; cf. Adjarian, *Dictionary*, III, 367; for Leo's seal, see V. Laurent, *La collection C. Orghidān* (Paris, 1952), no. 159; as for Michael Machetarios, who recorded a *pittakion* of Anna Dalassena in favor of St. Christodoulos, and for George Machetarios, who prepared a charter granting privileges to the Venetians, see Kazhdan, *Armiiane*, 102, nos. 5 and 6. See also V. Laurent, *Corpus des sceaux de l'empire byzantin*, II (Paris, 1981), no. 1026, the seal of an eparch (11th century) named Michael Machetarios. Laurent also mentions here unpublished seals referring to a Michael Machetarios, patriarchos and praipositos, who was active at the beginning of the 11th century. The seal of a Niketas Machetarios (perhaps 12th century) is published by Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, 675; see also Laurent, “Légendes sigillographiques,” 347–49.

<sup>13</sup> See Adjarian, *Dictionary*, V, 201–6 (44 entries).

ogy of the Greek, (καὶ) τ(ὸν) Φιλιππόν (the name preceded by the definite article), suggests that Philip(p)os could be his family and not his Christian name. As it happens, Φιλιππός as a family name is attested on an unpublished seal (late 10th/early 11th c.) in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection.<sup>14</sup> The bulla, ornamented on the obverse with a bust of St. Theodore, has on its reverse an inscription in five lines identifying the owner as Theodore Philippus, spatharios and judge. Still, because the name appears to be a Christian name in the Armenian, it is probably best understood as his baptismal name.

Since no title, either ecclesiastical or civil, is mentioned on our seal, it would appear that it was attached to some document of a private character. Why two names? The simplest and most direct explanation is that Machetarios and Philip(p)os were partners in a business venture.<sup>15</sup> Is the seal, properly speaking, a “Byzantine” seal? In view of the use among the empire's minority populations of Syriac and Arabic on seals, it is quite possible that the bulloteron that struck this seal was engraved within the borders of the empire. It is equally possible, of course, that the dies of the bulloteron were cut by an engraver working in a region along the eastern frontier governed by one of the empire's client chieftains. Nevertheless, the use of Greek on the seal indicates that seals struck by the bulloteron were intended for attachment to documents circulating among both Armenian and Greek speakers.

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<sup>14</sup> DO 55.1.3247.

<sup>15</sup> It is possible that the family name Philip(p)os may derive from a geographical designation, such as Philippi or Philippopolis (a suggestion of Prof. A. Kazhdan). In the 10th century, under John Tzimiskes, a large number of Armenians were removed from the frontier areas and resettled in Thrace, around Philippopolis; cf. P. Charanis, *The Armenians in the Byzantine Empire* (Lisbon, 1963), 15–16; sources: *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. J. Thurn (Berlin-New York, 1973), 286 = Georgius Cedrenus, *Historiarum Compendium*, ed. E. Bekker (Bonn, 1839), II, 382; and Anna Comnena, *Alexiad*, III, ed. B. Leib (Paris, 1945), XIV, 180. Other groups were later resettled in Macedonia as well. Armenian text: *Step'anosi Taronec'woy Asolkan Patmut'iwn tiezerakan*, ed. S. Malkhasiants (St. Petersburg, 1885), 201 (= chap. 20); see also Etienne Asolik de Taron, *Histoire universelle*, trans. F. Macler (Paris, 1917), 74. The patriarch Theodorokanos, who served as governor of Philippopolis in the early 11th century, was an Armenian (cf. Charanis, *Armenians*, 45). For the settlement of Armenians in the Balkans, see also A. Ormandjian, *Inventaire des sources arménienes sur l'histoire balkanique d'après le catalogue des manuscrits arméniens de la Congrégation des Méchitaristes*, Vienne (Sofia, 1980).